Der Matossian, Bedross: *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014, xii, 249 pp. ISBN: 978-0-80479-147-2

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For the past two decades, the 1908 Young Turk Revolution has been the focus of many historians of the early twentieth-century Middle East. By shedding light on the origins of the reinstatement of the Ottoman constitution in 1908 and its impact on the provinces of the Empire, these studies have successfully challenged a Western-oriented paradigm of modernisation. Bedross Der Matossian's *Shattered Dreams of Revolution* is one of the most important contributions to this body of scholarship. It examines, from a comparative perspective, the way in which three very different populations of the Empire – the Arabs, the Armenians and the Jews – responded to the Revolution. In the author's own words, the book is "not a microhistorical study. It does not concentrate on a single region and attempt to extrapolate major conclusions; rather, it takes a macrohistorical approach that includes different regions of the empire [...] through a comparative, inter- and intra-communal, cross-cultural analysis" (p. 5). The book is divided into three periods: the reinstatement of the constitution in 1908 and its direct aftermath, the parliamentary elections that followed, and the Counterrevolution which took place in 1909. Throughout these three periods, the author examines the numerous and often divided responses of Armenians, Jews and Arabs in different parts of the Empire, focusing on how their expectations of equality were progressively crushed.

The book includes an introduction, six core chapters, a conclusion, notes and an index. In the first two chapters, Der Matossian shows how the Revolution allowed numerous and competing public spheres to emerge. This led to a "paradoxical unity based in diversity" (p. 53) of confessions, languages, political factions and discourses within nondominant groups, which in turn foretold the many tensions inherent in the constitutionalist project, leading to its eventual failure. In Chapter 1 the author looks into various expressions of "euphoria" in the wake of the restoration of the Ottoman Constitution, through the language of individuals, places and symbols. Chapter 2 analyses the political discourses emerging in the media about notions such as liberty, equality and fraternity, as well as the ethnic groups' future political role, and "the ancien régime's afterlife" (p. 59). In Chapter 3, the changes in the dynamics of power following

the 1908 Revolution are discussed through the lens of the mircorevolutions happening within the three ethnic groups, namely the inner power struggles between the advocates of the *ancien régime and the supporters of the nouveau régime*. The two phases of the parliamentary elections are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5: firstly, the electoral campaign, during which intensive negotiations took place; secondly, the parliamentary politics that followed the elections amid high tension between the CUP and the Liberals. Most notably, Der Matossian shows how the notions of majority and minority, and, more generally, that of demographic representation, which played a major role after the partition of the Empire, were already key concepts in the politics of nondominant groups. Finally, Chapter 6 covers the period of 1909, when the Counterrevolution was crystallized. Again, opinions among the three ethnic groups were divided, but the tensions allowed new actors and groups to emerge. Arguably, it is during this period that dissimilarities between the three ethnic groups were the most striking, as clearly shown by the Adana Massacres of the Armenians in April 1909.

Historiographical work on the 1908 Young Turk Revolution generally argues that enthusiasm within non-Turkish populations was very short-lived and show how constitutionalism as a project for these groups was an overall failure. In this respect, Bedross Der Matossian's conclusion is no exception, as the title of his book suggests. However, his book is innovative in several ways. First, the author offers a comparative perspective of three ethno-religious groups which are usually studied separately. The historiography of the region is too often divided between the fields of Arab, Jewish and Armenian studies, usually because of a lack of combined language skills. With a mastery of all relevant languages, the author of the book is able to offer a rare opportunity for a cross-disciplinary reflection on the topic.

The second innovation lies in the author's selection of ethno-religious groups. Previous studies focusing on different ethno-religious populations within the borders of the Ottoman Empire tended to examine them either from the perspective of religion or from that of ethnicity and nationality. For instance, Feroz Ahmad discusses the question of the Young Turks' relations with Greeks, Armenians and Jews. In other words, he deals strictly with the relations of three *millet*-s, or non-Muslim communities, with power.[1] Similarly, when dealing with the emergence of competing nationalisms in the late Ottoman Empire, Fatma Müge Göçek makes a clear distinction between Turks and Arabs, as Muslims, on

1 Ahmad 1982.

the one hand, and Greeks and Armenians, as *millet*-s, on the other.[2] But Bedross Der Matossian breaks with the division between ethnicity and religion, by comparing Muslim (some Arabs) with non-Muslim (Jews and Armenians) populations. Partly due to the omnipresence of Arab countries in contemporary media and international politics, it is often forgotten that until the early twentieth century, Arab regions were mere peripheries of the Ottoman Empire. For instance, although Iraqi provinces were intensely re-Ottomanized in the second part of the nineteenth century, they were considered to be among the most remote provinces of the Empire. Contrary to what is sometimes assumed, the fact that most Arabs were Muslims did not automatically qualify them as being part of the dominant group, which the author defines as Turkish – not Muslim (p. 54). Thus, by defining Arabs as a nondominant group, Der Matossian challenges the epistemological line between the two fields of ethnicity and religion.

This *tour de force*, however, also comes with its own series of challenges, as the author himself acknowledges: "Such studies are particularly challenging because the differences among the societal structures, religions, ethnicities, languages, and cultures of these groups outnumber their similarities" (p. 74). For example, the 1908 Revolution was a time of important changes for the *millet*-s from a legal point of view. Both Armenians (1863) and Jews (1865) had their own constitutions or organic laws which needed to be fundamentally redefined. Between 1908 and 1909, the Jewish community of Beirut established new statuses, elected a new leadership and completely redefined the role of its committees.[3] Such significant changes in the normative legal statuses did not affect the Arab populations in the same way as they affected the Jews, the Armenians or the Greeks, because the Arabs did not constitute a religious *millet*. Nevertheless, the author overcomes these methodological obstacles by diversifying the perspectives. More often than not, emphasis is given to specific individuals such as "revolutionary heroes" (p. 32), or discourses, symbols and places (e.g. flags and edifices). Additionally, cities or specific territories are examined. For example, in the case of the *mutasarrifiyyah* – or governorate – of Mount Lebanon, Der Matossian clearly identifies the impact of regional and local dynamics on the political changes that the Arabs underwent. And he does so for a number of cities, including Salonica, Beirut, Adana, and Nablus.

In other words, the study opens many doors in terms of method as well as structure and scale (both at the micro and the macro level) of research in the field of Middle Eastern history. And it prompts the historians to face an inescapable question: why were there so many different responses to the

2 Göçek 2002: 19.

3 Levi 2012.

constitutionalist project? One will notice the absence of a separate bibliography, a regrettable yet growing phenomenon in academic publications. Apart from this minor inconvenience, however, the book is a major contribution to the scholarship of the late Ottoman Empire, and is written in a very accessible style. It will be of great use to scholars interested in the history of the Ottoman Empire, and Jewish, Armenian and Arab history, as well as to those interested in the topic of non-Muslim and non-Turkish populations in the Middle East in general. It is also highly recommended to anyone working on later periods of the modern Middle East, as many social, political and cultural phenomena that took place after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire can be traced back to the dynamics of the late Ottoman period covered by this book.

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